

HIGHLIGHTS OF 1998

Implementation of the "Electric Service Customers Choice and Rate Relief Law of 1997" has brought new challenges and opportunities to Consumer Services Division (CSD). CSD Staff led the Consumer Education campaign for the small businesses, Delivery Services Consumer Issues Working Group, Reliability Claims procedures, and the Reliability Survey rulemaking. In addition, we have assisted in the Environmental Disclosure rulemaking, the Alternative Retail Electric Suppliers (ARES) certification docket, and Delivery Services Terms and Conditions docket.

Participation in the Ameritech/SBC merger has brought an opportunity to present Consumer Services Division's (CSD) concerns to the Commission.

Slamming/Cramming legislation passed this past year, and CSD has worked diligently to implement this legislation by investigating consumers' allegations and assuring correction to the consumers' bills. CSD is responsible for reviewing all companies' practices to determine any need to initiate a proceeding before the Commission. This past year CSD worked closely with the Illinois Attorney General's Consumer Fraud Bureau to expedite complaint processing and assure appropriate action is taken. Several law suits against slamming and cramming violators have been filed this past year by the Office of the Attorney General.

Complaint volume has increased in 1998 from 1997 by 16%. Opened complaints in 1998 totaled 31,425 as compared to 26,448 in 1997. Staff was successful in securing for consumers \$2.4 million in refunds of utility erroneous charges. This year's report also includes two new sections of analyses: utility company response time and the justification of complaints received.

Complaint processing has become more efficient due to utilities being able to exchange complaint information electronically. Ameritech and Illinois Power have greatly assisted by participating in the process. We hope to add more companies in electronic exchange this coming year.

Illinois Telecommunications Access Corporation (ITAC) finalized its recall of the old Teletypewriters (TTYs), replacing them with the Ameriphone Dialogue IIIP. As the current contract for Telecommunications Relay Services expires soon, ITAC spent this year compiling information to develop and write their RFP for relay service. This will result in a new contract being signed and approved by the Commission in 1999 and service beginning in February, 2000.

On January 1, 1998, the Universal Telephone Assistance Corporation (UTAC) implemented the new Lifeline and Link Up Programs that were mandated by the FCC's 1996 Telecommunications Act. UTAC raised the state Link Up support from \$10 to the remaining 50% of the installation charge and has requested Commission approval to supplement the \$5.25 Lifeline support with \$1.50,

thereby gaining another \$.75 in federal support, for a total of \$7.50. The voluntary contributions that support both of these programs has continued to increase do to the generosity of Illinois ratepayers.

This year, five new 9-1-1 systems went live with enhanced 9-1-1 Service. Currently, one municipality and 20 counties are in the process of establishing Enhanced 9-1-1 Service. Illinois still has 19 counties that have not yet passed referendums and lack any type of 9-1-1 service.

During the past year 9-1-1 Staff has been very busy dealing with a whole host of issues, i.e., competition, number portability, private switch/automatic location identification issues. Many issues surfaced due to the onset of these topics, so Staff felt it necessary to initiate a rulemaking for the 83 Illinois Administrative Code Part 725 in order to address some concerns. Staff hosted numerous workshops and subcommittee meetings regarding the rewrite of Part 725. A draft proposed rule has been created with the intention of opening a docketed proceeding the first quarter of 1999.

1999 brings many new challenges to CSD that include: the implementation of the Electric Choice Consumer Education Campaign; the review and approval of new delivery services tariffs; writing the Reliability Survey rule; implementing Commonwealth Edison's claims and procedures; the application of slamming/cramming legislation; and participation in the Ameritech/SBC and GTE/Bell Atlantic merger dockets.

1998 ANNUAL REPORT

This report provides an overview of the programs and activities that were undertaken, completed, and implemented by the 27 member Staff of the Illinois Commerce Commission's Consumer Services Division (CSD) during 1998. It includes such information as a breakdown of the types of complaints that were received and how they were resolved; new approaches to resolving complaints; a look at CSD's involvement with programs such as the Universal Telephone Service Assistance Program (UTSAP), 9-1-1, the TTY distribution program and the telecommunications relay service (TRS); and certain on-going projects.

I hope this report will serve as a guide to understand the needs and concerns of utility consumers in Illinois and the ways in which the Consumer Services Division addresses these important matters.

Debi Barr-Holquist
Manager

CONSUMER EDUCATION/COMPLAINT ACTIVITY

The consumer counselors respond to utility consumers' complaints or questions regarding utility service. To serve its consumer clients, the Consumer Services Division (CSD) has offices in Springfield and Chicago which receive consumer complaints from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm., Monday through Friday.

The complaint process is comprised of two levels—informal and formal. Through the informal complaint process, a consumer counselor attempts to answer consumers' questions or resolve their complaints. Through the formal complaint process, the consumer and the utility present their cases before a hearing examiner who makes a recommendation to the Commissioners for their consideration. A mediation process has also been implemented to expand the informal complaint process for customers of Ameritech, Commonwealth Edison, North Shore Gas, and Peoples Gas (see page 10).

In response to the need for an accurate and readily available record of complaints reported to the Consumer Services Division, a computerized complaint tracking system was designed. From its inception in 1983, the Automated Complaint Tracking System (ACTS) has been a valuable asset. Consumer complaints can be identified not only in such general categories as billing, credit and deposits, rates, service, termination; they can also be identified in more specific terms.

Following the June 1997 conversion of the Automated Complaint Tracking System (ACTS) to a local area network (LAN) application, two enhancements were added in 1998. In July, a "quick search" feature was added which allows each staff member to review any recent complaints a customer might have filed while speaking with the customer. Since implementation of this feature, the number of duplicate complaints sent to utilities has decreased. In addition, standardized letters were created and stored in ACTS to allow staff to quickly send customers information regarding the most common complaint issues.

Electronic exchange with utilities increased significantly in 1998. During the year, Illinois Power joined Ameritech in receiving and responding to complaints from the Commission via e-mail. During the first quarter of 1999, Nicor Gas will also join this group of utilities that electronically exchanges information with the Commission. This process yields faster complaint resolutions since utilities can both receive and respond to complaints with greater efficiency. Utility responses enter ACTs directly, eliminating the significant task of data entry of the utility's position on an individual complaint.

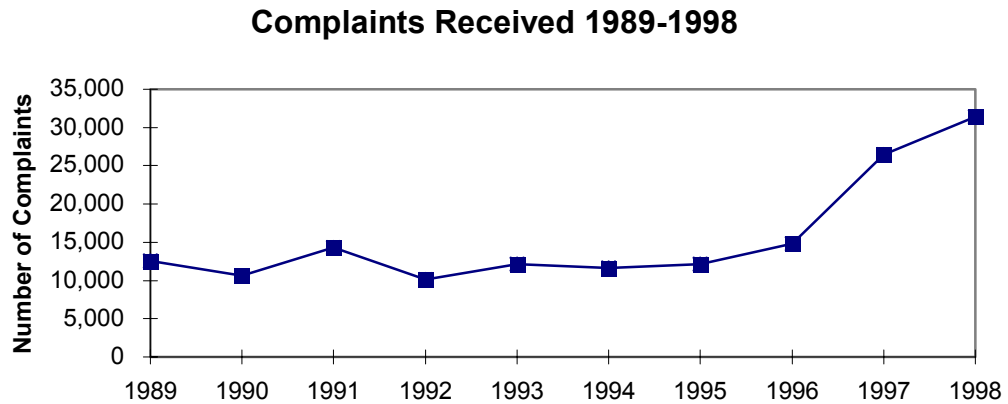
Informal Complaints

The informal complaint process is divided into two basic types of complaints—consumer education and investigative complaints. Consumer education calls typically entail questions or comments that require no further

investigation beyond the consumer's initial phone call. Investigative complaints require an investigation of the consumer's problem, often necessitating contact with the utility to review the appropriate records or policy procedures. If necessary, the counselor will attempt to resolve the problem through discussion with the utility representative. If a resolution is not reached through the informal complaint process, the consumer may opt to proceed with either the mediation process (when that option is available) or with the formal complaint process.

During 1998, CSD Staff received 31,425 inquiries or complaints. Graph 1 shows the trend in the number of complaints that the Consumer Services Division has received from 1989 through 1998. Prior to 1996 the Division averaged about 12,000 complaints each year. Increased staffing in 1996 allowed us to respond to nearly 15,000 complaints; the higher level of complaints is generally attributed to the unauthorized switching of long distance carriers. The dramatic increased level of complaints in 1998 is the result of our improved capability to receive and process complaints, the dedication of our Staff and the increased level of consumers' need for information and assistance.

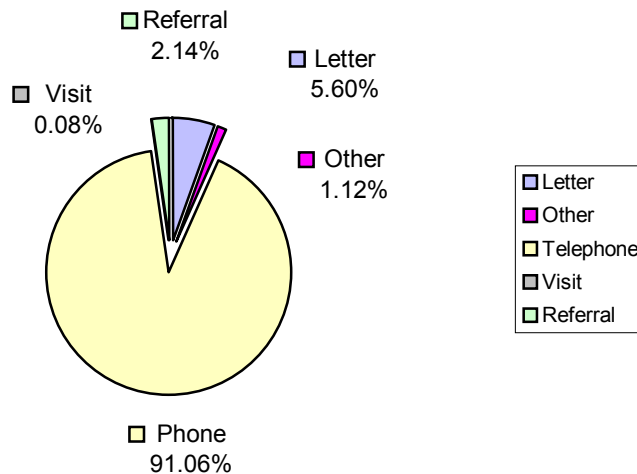
Graph 1



As a part of our ongoing cooperation with the Consumer Fraud Bureau of the Office of the Illinois Attorney General we provide the Bureau with information concerning complaints related to the unauthorized switching of consumers' preferred phone carriers, known as "slamming," and the unauthorized addition of services, known as "cramming." We believe that consumers benefit from our exchange of information as the Attorney General pursues remedies resulting from companies' fraudulent practices.

Graph 2

Origin of Complaints



There were 31,425 informal complaint cases opened during 1998. Most informal complaints (91%) begin with a telephone call to our toll-free number. We received 1759 letters mailed directly to the Consumer Services Division, but many of the complaints which are referred to us by other Divisions and those coming through the legislative route are also in letter form. While some customers prefer to visit us in person, this is not the norm. Over the last several

years, the Division has opened new avenues, as noted below, to resolve customer inquiries in the most direct method possible.

3 Way Calling

This is a process to interface directly with the company while the consumer is still on the phone. This dramatically decreases the amount of time and paperwork needed to complete the task. Beginning as a pilot idea in 1996, this concept is used by the following utilities: ***Ameritech, Central Illinois Light Company, Ameren CIPS, Citizens Utilities, Commonwealth Edison, General Telephone, Illinois Power, Nicor Gas, MCI, and Peoples Gas.*** Certain types of complaints lend themselves to this type of resolution. Complaints are limited to payment arrangements, payment extensions, final notices, repairs, medical certificates and billing issues that can be resolved the same day. During 1998, 7,171 complaints were handled in this manner.

Hot-line Referrals

CSD has arranged with three major utilities (Commonwealth Edison, Ameritech, and General Telephone) to provide a "hot-line" to which counselors refer certain customers who they believe may be helped by discussing their complaint with high level utility personnel. These referrals are not included in any of our statistics.


Company v Company

CSD has been successful in the resolution of complaints between utilities (or marketers working on behalf of customers), referred to as "company v company" complaints. The changing environment in the utility industry and the advent of competition have signaled the need for a venue in which no-fault compromises can be achieved, benefiting both the parties involved in the dispute and the consumers they serve. All parties benefit when a complaint can be resolved informally, avoiding the need for a formal complaint. Parties who have taken part in the process have expressed satisfaction with both the procedure and the results.

Consumer Services Online

The Commission's presence on the World Wide Web is steadily improving as more information is added. Located in tandem with consumer information summaries of important sections of Illinois Administrative Codes, the CSD e-mail address received contacts from consumers concerned with a wide variety of non-emergency issues (site instructions advise that consumers with pressing matters concerning their service contact CSD immediately by telephone at 1-800-524-0795). In March 1999, CSD is changing its e-mail address to <**consumer@icc.state.il.us**>. In addition to the consumer hotline and traditional mail, consumers may submit complaints and inquiries electronically to the new address for CSD e-mail. During 1997, CSD took 41 complaints via our web site. During 1998, the number of such complaints increased by 336% to 179 cases received by e-mail from consumers. Not

surprisingly, many of the complaints received in 1998 covered topics relating to telecommunications, and in particular, Internet access issues. Many consumers in rural areas of Illinois must dial outside their closest local calling area to access the Internet, and this may lead to a number of difficulties. 1998 saw the filing of two large formal complaints revolving, in part, around this issue.



Complaint Categories

Investigative complaints are categorized by problem type. These categories include billing, credit/deposit, rates, service, termination, and other. This graph illustrates that 48% of the investigative complaints received related to the consumer's bill. CSD opened significantly fewer complaints in the other categories. Graph 3 presents the number of complaints that were received during 1998 in each problem identification category.

Graph 3

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The following chart indicates the issues about which most complaints are made in a review of 1998 complaints received. To correlate this information with that found in Graph 3, the complaint issues are further defined with the Problem Identification Code in parenthesis.

TOP 10 COMPLAINTS	
Seeking reconnection (Termination)	2517
Need payment arrangements (Billing)	2242
Accuracy of bill- usage/consumption (Billing)	2025
Accuracy of bill- responsibility for account (Billing)	1975
Disputed bill rendered by other company (Billing)	1684
Conduct of Company Personnel/"slamming" (Service)	1172
Other (Other)	1104
Accuracy of bill- billed for service/feature not ordered "cramming" (Billing)	1074
No jurisdiction (Other)	904
Bill payment- deferred payment agreement (Billing)	799

Cases Closed During 1998

CSD closed 30,949 cases during 1998. The table below reveals how the cases were resolved and the number of cases that CSD closed within each resolution category.

MEANS OF RESOLVING COMPLAINTS	
Information or explanation provided	16,097
Company compromised to settle	4,224
Referral to other agency or Division	3,188
Company agrees to correct mistake or error	2,268
Complaint dismissed; groundless	1,820
ICC had no jurisdiction	701
Could not reach customer	465
Untimely filing	403
Miscellaneous	389
Duplicate action by another counselor	333
Action initiated to correct problem	301
Meter tested; billing correct	211
Pending long term utility action	113
Formal hearing sought	107
CSD received carbon copy response	107
Customer requested withdrawal of complaint	94
Utility/COPTS vendor unresponsive	72
Repeated Complaint	42
Mediation	10
Company does not have a certificate	4
TOTAL	30,949

Mediation

The Mediation program is available to consumers who are dissatisfied with the results of an informal complaint against either Ameritech, Commonwealth Edison, or Peoples Gas. Mediation offers the customer and the utility a chance to meet to further discuss, clarify, and provide documentation to support their contentions without escalating the complaint to a formal

proceeding. The Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR), a non-profit organization based in Chicago, agreed to mediate these cases at no charge to the consumer, the utility or the ICC. The mediation takes place in Chicago and therefore this option is necessarily limited to Chicago-area customers.

Between January 1, 1998 and December 31, 1998, a total of 31 complaints were referred to the Staff coordinator for mediation. For various reasons, referred complaints do not always proceed to mediation. This year 22 of the 31 cases were not mediated. Forty-one percent of the “referred” complaints were brought to resolution between the customer and the utility. In an additional 41% of the cases, the utility refused to mediate. The chart below shows the reasons complaints did not proceed to mediation.

Complaint settled	9
Company refused to mediate	9
Customer refused to mediate	2
Unable to contact customer	2
TOTAL	22

9 complaints proceeded to mediation in 1998 with the following results:

OUTCOME	NUMBER
Agreement	6
No agreement	2
Unable to hold session	1
TOTAL	9

Mediation sessions were held in 8 of the 9 cases. As shown in the table above, 6 of the 8 cases mediated resulted in agreement, a positive resolution rate of 75%. The average closure time for those cases which proceeded to mediation was 4.9 weeks. The following table shows the cases referred to the staff coordinator for mediation by utility company.

UTILITY	NUMBER
Commonwealth Edison	19
Peoples Gas	7
North Shore Gas	1
Ameritech	4

The number of complaints proceeding to mediation has fluctuated widely during the past three years. During 1996, 32 cases were referred to mediation, in 1997 there were 13 referrals. This year there were 31 referrals.

Customers who have been referred to mediation continue to have the option of filing a formal complaint to pursue their complaints. Two of the 31 customers referred to the mediation coordinator filed formal complaints. Of these, one case was dismissed and the other case is awaiting a decision.

Formal Complaints

If a resolution is not reached through the informal process (including mediation), the consumer may then file for a formal hearing. After the fully completed forms are submitted to the Commission, a hearing is scheduled. The hearing, similar to a court hearing, takes place before a Commission Hearing Examiner. The Hearing Examiner considers the testimony presented, reviews the evidence and makes a recommendation to the Commissioners for their consideration.

During 1998, 107 customers indicated that they would file a formal complaint and 42 formal hearings were actually docketed. The 1998 formal complaint level is comparable to previous years despite the overall increased number of informal complaints.

Justified Complaints

Justified complaints should have been resolved without contact with CSD; they should have been handled by the utility. A counselor investigates a complaint and makes a decision as to whether or not the utility took the proper action prior to CSD's involvement. This is a judgment call made by the counselor investigating the complaint based on the proper procedures and Commission regulations. The following charts indicate the percentages of total justified complaints for the energy, telecommunications and water-sewer industries. The utilities listed below are the ones with justified complaints.

ENERGY COMPANIES	JUSTIFIED COMPLAINTS	TOTAL COMPLAINTS	PERCENT OF TOTAL JUSTIFIED COMPLAINTS
CILCO	21	323	6.5%
CIPS	10	300	3.3%
ComEd	1108	8457	13.1%
IP	92	992	9.3%
Mid-American	4	62	6.5%
Mt. Carmel	1	6	16.7%
North Shore Gas	13	94	13.8%
Nicor Gas	134	1333	10.1%
Peoples Gas	395	3219	12.3%
Union Electric	11	129	8.5%

TELECOM. COMPANIES	JUSTIFIED COMPLAINTS	TOTAL COMPLAINTS	PERCENT OF TOTAL JUSTIFIED COMPLAINTS
Ameritech	721	5936	12.1%
AT&T	420	1207	34.8%
Central Telephone	6	29	20.7%
GTE North	145	1463	9.9%
MCI	347	1030	33.7%
Mcleod	5	184	2.7%
Sprint	60	181	33.1%

WATER/SEWER COMPANIES	JUSTIFIED COMPLAINTS	TOTAL COMPLAINTS	PERCENT OF TOTAL JUSTIFIED COMPLAINTS
Consumers Illinois	7	105	6.7%
IL-American Water	3	35	8.6%

Response Time

According to the Commission rules, the utility is allowed 14 days to respond to CSD. The utility may request an extension as long as both parties agree. Once the 14 days have passed, a letter goes out to the utility advising them that the complaint is over due. The following graphs show the utilities' average response times for those utilities that received 25 or more complaints during 1998.

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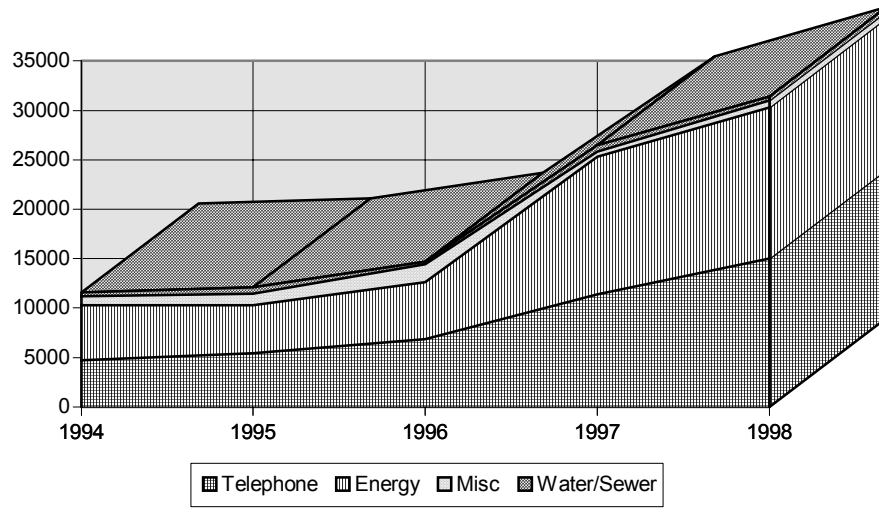
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REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS BY INDUSTRY

This section addresses and highlights trends in the numbers and types of complaints for each industry. CSD categorizes the complaints it receives according to the following industries: telephone, energy, water/sewer and miscellaneous. As shown in Graph 4, the number of complaints received for each industry varies greatly and has changed somewhat from 1994 to 1998. Graph 5 shows the complaints by utility type for 1998. Telephone industry complaints comprised 48% of the total number of complaints received during 1998; significant technological changes and deregulation in the industry account for much of the complaint volume. If one considers the energy industry as a whole by combining the gas, electric and electric/gas complaints, the result is 49% of the total complaints. The water/sewer industry receives the fewest complaints (1%). The miscellaneous category essentially includes companies that are not regulated by the ICC.

Graph 4

Complaints by Utility Type



Graph 5

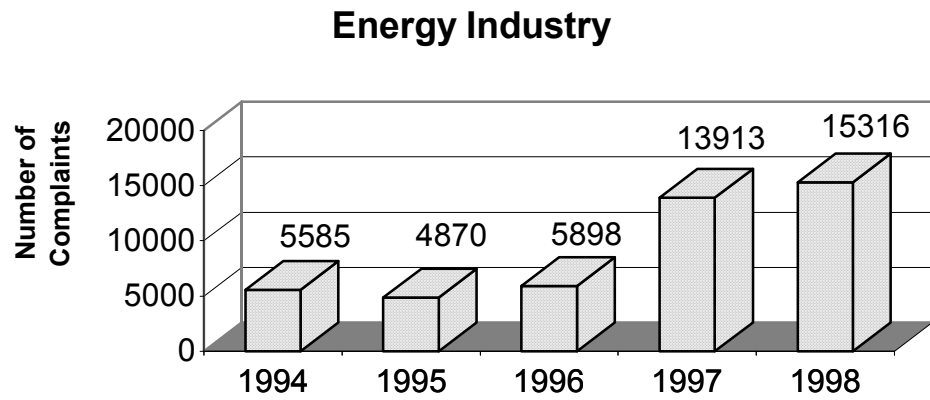
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The following pages will focus on three industries: energy, telephone and water/sewer. To clarify, the energy industry is comprised of electric, gas and companies which provide both services (electric/gas). This section includes a five-year tracking of the number of complaints received for each industry, a four-year comparison of the number of complaints received for the major companies in each industry and a listing of the types of investigative complaints received for each industry. Please note that the five-year tracking of complaints received for each industry includes both investigative and consumer education complaints.

ENERGY INDUSTRY

Graphs 6 shows the number of complaints that were received by CSD for the electric and gas companies during 1994 through 1998. The significant increase in 1998 is attributed to the general increase in the call volume due to CSD's improved telephone and computer systems.

Graph 6



Graph 7 illustrates the trend in the number of complaints received per 10,000 customers for the major companies in the energy industry.

Graph 7

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1998 ENERGY COMPLAINTS FOR SMALLER COMPANIES (ELECTRIC AND GAS)		
Company	Customers*	Complaints
Interstate	13,890	2
Mt. Carmel	6,000	6
South Beloit	9,363	6
Union Electric	64,215	129

*Estimated Number

ENERGY INDUSTRY -- INVESTIGATIVE COMPLAINTS

BILLING	COMPLAINTS
Payment Arrangement	2630
Usage-Consumption	1362
Responsibility for Account	1222
Meter	522
Accuracy	209
Bill/Statement	407
Payment - general	268
Repair/Service	53
Payment Posting Problem	194
Tampering	73
Extension/Installation dispute	13
SUBTOTAL	6953

TERMINATION	COMPLAINTS
Seeking Reconnection	2058
Medical Certificate	198
Other	153
Procedures	212
Terminated in error	67
Disputed Bill/Deposit	69
Tampering	92
SUBTOTAL	2849

CREDIT/DEPOSIT	COMPLAINTS
Deposit Requirement	616
Service Denial	376
Deposit Amount/Conditions	120
Deposit Administration	118
SUBTOTAL	1230

SERVICE	COMPLAINTS
Timeliness of Reconnection/Disconnection	573
Timeliness - General	627
Interruptions	776
Conduct of Personnel	304
Service Quality	238
Safety	92
Equipment Problems	100
Extension/Availability	23
SUBTOTAL	2733

RATES	COMPLAINTS
Rate Structure	83
Inquiry	111
Opinion - Rate in Effect	120
Proposed Rate	15
SUBTOTAL	329

OTHER	COMPLAINTS
Other	485
No Jurisdiction	160
Specific Issues	590
SUBTOTAL	1235

**TOTAL NUMBER OF INVESTIGATIVE
ENERGY COMPLAINTS: 15,329**

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

Graph 8 shows the number of complaints that were received by CSD for the telephone industry during 1994 through 1998. The significant increase in 1998 is attributed to the general increase in the call volume due to improved telephone and computer systems. Graph 9 illustrates the trend in the number of complaints per 10,000 access lines that were received for the major telephone companies from 1995 through 1998. The spike in Sprint/Centel's complaints in 1998 was due to Gallatin River purchasing the Sprint/Centel service area. Once this happened, Gallatin River customers experienced some billing problems with their AT&T long distance accounts. Gallatin corrected this by providing customers' billing credits and setting customers up on optional calling plans with AT&T.

Graph 8

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Graph 9

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Changes in the telecommunications industry have caused a proliferation of services about which customers can complain or make inquiries. With the improved complaint tracking system, Staff is now able to more accurately reflect the type of service about which we are getting complaints and inquiries.

Graph 10

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Definitions for the previous graph:

COPTS - Customer Owned Pay Telephone Service -pay telephones owned and operated by someone other than the Incumbent Local Exchange Carrier (LEC)

Cellular -Mobile – cellular or mobile service

Local Long Distance - local calls that are made to locations outside the local exchange boundary, but within the Market Service Area (MSA)*

Provider Additional Service- a company other than the local exchange carrier, local long distance carrier and inter-exchange carrier that provides additional services (i.e., a calling card, internet service, etc...)

Competitive Access Provider - a company, other than the Incumbent Local Exchange Carrier (LEC), that provides local access to telephone service

IXC - Inter-Exchange Carrier - a company that provides service between exchanges and between Market Service Areas (MSAs)*

LEC - Local Exchange Carrier - a company that provides local exchange service

Telephone - Complaints that were unable to be placed in specific categories (IXC, LEC, Competitive Access or Local Long Distance)

* Comparable to LATA (Local Access Transport Area)

CURRENT TELECOMMUNICATION ISSUES

Illinois Enacts New Anti-Slamming/Cramming Legislation

During the Summer of 1998, new enforcement powers were granted to the Commission for dealing with two very important issues of consumer fraud in telecommunications: the unauthorized changing of a consumer's selected telecommunications carrier (slamming) and the unauthorized addition of extra telecommunications services to a consumer's bill (cramming). As a result of this new statutory power, the Consumer Services Division of the ICC developed revised procedures for the handling and recording of alleged occurrences of slamming and cramming. Consumers who contact CSD regarding these matters receive the following services:

- direct referral of their information to the Illinois Attorney General's Office, with which CSD has an established sharing program to enhance the State's efforts to combat slamming and cramming.
- referral to the Federal Communications Commission hotline of 1-888-225-5322.
- advice on services available from their local carrier, including: PIC restrictions to help prevent slamming; re-rating of charges to the level of the preferred carrier; recourse procedures to remove

disputed items from consumer bills; and other general dispute procedures.

- investigative/corrective informal complaint sent to the company responsible for the alleged violation.

Greater scrutiny than ever has been focused on the problems of slamming and cramming, both within Illinois and on a national level as well. Following the enactment of Illinois' legislation on this topic and with the advent of CSD's revised procedures to accommodate the law, our office has recorded a marked decline in the numbers of such cases.

Confusion over Competition

As more services move toward competition, CSD's role as an educator has increased dramatically. Telecommunications consumers in Illinois may pre-select companies to provide them with Inter-LATA , Intra-LATA, and in many areas, Local phone services. The ICC has certificated or entered into the certification process with over 200 companies that may provide competitive local phone service in Illinois. CSD is represented at all certification hearings to ensure that the needs and rights of consumers will be met by any prospective competitors. The list of local exchange certificate cases is available at: <www.icc.state.il.us> under the Telecommunications Division.

With 18 distinct LATAs, several of which are shared with adjoining states, Illinois provides a complex marketplace for phone consumers. To help educate consumers, CSD developed a document and LATA map which is mailed to consumers who have questions and is also available at: <www.icc.state.il.us>.

Changes in Phone Bill Charges

CSD handled many contacts from consumers during 1998 as a result of new charges and changes to existing charges that appear on phone bills. Most of these dealt with either telecommunications access or universal service. In response to these concerns and to help answer questions regarding other surcharges and taxes which appear on consumer phone bills, CSD developed a document for mailing to consumers which is also available on the Commission's web site at: <www.icc.state.il.us> under the Telecommunications Division.

Area Codes

In the past, Chicago and its suburbs have experienced several geographic alterations in the area codes assigned to consumers in those areas. Most recently, however, the ICC has taken new steps to address shortages in available numbers. In 1998, the ICC made an order to all carriers that number pooling must be utilized as a measure to reduce the loss of available numbers for the 847 area code, and number pooling started in the 847 area code as of June 1, 1998. Instead of assigning massive blocks of numbers that may go unused, this conservation by pooling method allows companies to take only the numbers they need. This has already delayed the need for new area codes, but it is still thought that they will eventually become necessary. However, unlike previous changes to area codes in and around Chicago, the current situation will be handled by an overlay of the new 224 area code. This will allow all established customers to retain their current phone numbers. Only new line phone number requests will receive the new area code if there are no more 847 numbers left for their particular exchange. Such advanced planning and work has already allowed Illinois to be granted an exception to FCC rules that would normally prohibit mandatory number pooling.

Detailed information on the history and proceedings which relate to this matter, may be found at: <www.icc.state.il.us> under the Telecommunications Division.

During 1998, CSD answered many consumer inquiries regarding the area code issue. Although many consumers said they will not be happy with the inconvenience of the eventual necessity for 11-digit dialing to go with the new overlay, most were relieved to find out that they will be able to retain their old numbers and the new code will not mean a further geographic split for Chicago and its suburbs.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY – INVESTIGATIVE COMPLAINTS

BILLING	COMPLAINTS
Disputed Bill by Other Company	1569
Payment Arrangements	1079
Bill Feature not Ordered	920
Accuracy - General	470
Usage/Consumption	651
Responsibility for Account	735
Payment - General	401
Bill Statement	599
Repair/Service	170
Dispute - Rate Classification /Plan	331
Extension/Installation Dispute	12
SUBTOTAL	6937

SERVICE	COMPLAINTS
Unauthorized Change of Service (slamming)	1285
Timeliness of Performed Work	695
Quality	315
Poor performance by Utility Personnel	260
Conduct of Billing Agents/Outside Contractors	207
Availability of Features & Equipment	268
Equipment Problems	134
Service Interruptions	104
Service Extensions	16
Safety	10
SUBTOTAL	3294

CREDIT & DEPOSIT	COMPLAINTS
Service Denial	166
Deposit Amount/Conditions	28
Deposit Administration	19
SUBTOTAL	213

RATES	COMPLAINTS
Rate Inquiry	336
Opinion of Rate in effect	398
Rate Structure	908
Proposed Rate Change	40
SUBTOTAL	1682

TERMINATION	COMPLAINTS
Seeking Reconnection	435
Disputes	129
Medical Certificate	61
Questions	101
SUBTOTAL	726

OTHER	COMPLAINTS
Current issues	374
Other	1134
No Jurisdiction	426
Concerns - General	36
SUBTOTAL	1970

TOTAL NUMBER OF INVESTIGATIVE TELECOMMUNICATION COMPLAINTS: 14,822

WATER & SEWER INDUSTRY

Graph 11 shows the number of complaints that were received by CSD for the water/sewer industry during 1994 through 1998. Graph 12 illustrates the trend in the number of complaints per 10,000 customers that were received for the major companies in the water/sewer industry from 1995 through 1998. The spike in Citizens Utilities complaints in 1995 was due to a rate increase.

Graph 11

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Graph 12

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WATER & SEWER INDUSTRY -- INVESTIGATIVE COMPLAINTS

TERMINATION	COMPLAINTS
Seeks Reconnection	25
Procedure	10
Miscellaneous	2
Disputed Bill or Deposit	6
SUBTOTAL	43

RATES	COMPLAINTS
Proposed Rate	80
Opinion-rate in effect	16
Rate Inquiries	11
Rate Structure	4
SUBTOTAL	111

BILLING	COMPLAINTS
Payment/billing general	31
Usage/Consumption	41
Payment Arrangements	33
Bill Statement	16
SUBTOTAL	121

SERVICE	COMPLAINTS
Service Quality	16
Conduct of Personnel	8
Service Extension	8
Equipment Problems/Safety/Interruption	4
Timeliness of Performed Service	5
SUBTOTAL	41

CREDIT & DEPOSIT	COMPLAINTS
Deposit Requirement	8
Deposit Amount or Conditions	3
SUBTOTAL	11

OTHER	COMPLAINTS
Other	25
No Jurisdiction	59
SUBTOTAL	84

**TOTAL INVESTIGATIVE WATER AND
SEWER COMPLAINTS: 411**

CONSUMER PROGRAMS

9-1-1

Through the 9-1-1 program, communities and counties establish and operate 9-1-1 emergency telephone service. Prior to Commission approval, the 9-1-1 Staff works with the communities throughout the planning process, reviews their implementation plans and participates in the hearings. During 1998, the Commission granted 17 "Orders of Authority to Operate" or "Amending Orders." In addition, the Commission issued 7 orders to telecommunication carriers for call box waivers. By the end of 1998, there were 200 Enhanced (E9-1-1) and 15 Basic 9-1-1 systems on line in Illinois. The graphs below show, 96% of the state's population and 73% of the land area are now served with either Basic or Enhanced 9-1-1. A 9-1-1 Status Report is available to provide more details about 9-1-1 systems in Illinois.

Graph 13

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The 9-1-1 Act was amended in 1987 to provide municipalities and counties with a means to fund 9-1-1 systems. This is accomplished by imposing a surcharge on the telephone

bills of local exchange carrier consumers who live in the area served by the 9-1-1 system. However, communities may impose a surcharge only if it is approved by local referendum. Municipalities with a population over 500,000, however, may impose a surcharge up to \$1.25 without a referendum. In 1998, 7 9-1-1 referendums were approved by the electorate. Out of the 7 referendums held, 2 of them were to increase existing current surcharges, 2 were first-time referendums, and 3 failed. The 1998 figures bring the total number of referendums passed since the General Assembly authorized this funding mechanism to 243. This includes municipalities, counties, first-time and subsequent referendums. Nineteen counties have not yet passed a referendum to provide E9-1-1 service.

In 1998, 9-1-1 Staff participated in 7 call box waiver hearings. Call boxes are required at each central office for every telecommunication carrier. Call boxes provide a 9-1-1 back-up solution in case there are problems with the line between the central office and the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers typically have offices in each exchange, however, competitive carriers may only have one switch that serves their entire customer base. The use of call boxes by competitive carriers was not a viable solution so temporary waivers were sought. It is Staff's intention to open the 83 Illinois Administrative Code Part 725 for rulemaking in order to explore other viable options and alternatives to the use of call boxes.

CALL BOX WAIVER ORDERS IN 1998

DATE	TELECOMMUNICATON CARRIER
June 12	Windstar
June 22	Teligent
July 8	MCI Metro Access
July 8	Focal Communications Corp. of IL
July 8	Nextlink IL, Inc.
September 23	Allegiance Telecom, Inc.
September 23	21 st Century

SYSTEMS GRANTED ORDERS IN 1998

DATE	COUNTY	TYPE OF ORDER
January 1	Northwest Central Dispatch	Amended Order
February 2	Vermilion	Order to Operate
March 11	Cook	Order to Operate
April 8	Mercer	Amended Order
May 6	Kendall	Amended Order
May 6	Will	Amended Order
June 3	Cumberland	Order to Operate
June 3	Kane	Amended Order
June 3	Kendall	Amended Order
July 8	DuPage	Amended Order
July 22	Edgar	Order to Operate
August 12	Marion	Amended Order
August 12	Perry	Order to Operate
November 5	City of Streator	Order to Operate
November 5	Livingston	Amended Order
November 5	White	Order to Operate

December 16	Village of Bridgeview	Amended Order
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The 83 Illinois Administrative Code Part 725 (Standards of Service Applicable to 9-1-1 Emergency Systems) was adopted in 1979 and amended most recently in 1996. The structural and technological advances in the telecommunications industry have prompted the Staff to consider additional revisions to the Code Part. As a result numerous workshops have been held to listen to the concerns of representatives from the industry, 9-1-1 systems and Staff.

Teletypewriter Distribution and Telecommunications Relay Service

The Commission designed and implemented a program whereby the local exchange carriers (LECs) provide a Teletypewriter (TTY) to persons with hearing and speech disabilities, or organizations whose primary purpose is serving persons with hearing and speech disabilities. The local exchange carriers provide a telecommunications relay service (TRS), which links people who use a TTY and people who use a standard telephone. There is a charge for each subscriber line to offset the costs incurred by the local exchange carriers. The Commission ordered the line charge to remain at 8 cents in May 1998.

The TTY distribution program and relay center are administered by the Illinois Telecommunications Access Corporation (ITAC), a not-for-profit corporation which includes all the LECs in Illinois. An Advisory Council comprised of 7 members who are users of the TTY and TRS provide input to ITAC as well as to the Commission Staff Liaison.

Since the program's inception in November 1988, 8,899 TTYs have been distributed. Among the recipients of these devices, 65 not-for-profit organizations have benefited from this program. During 1998, over 1.7 million calls were handled through the relay system, and 345 TTYs were distributed through 19 centers located throughout the state. ITAC distributed 1 TTY with a large visual display this year, bringing the total to 176. There was 1 telebraille machine distributed this year, bringing the total to 18. The total number of calls processed by the relay service since June 1990 has reached over 9.5 million.

ITAC finalized their recall of the old TTYs and replacing them with the Ameriphone TTYs. ITAC redesigned its video and "E-Z Users Guide" to assist in training people who receive a new TTY.

The Publicity Club of Chicago presented ITAC with the Golden Trumpet Award, which is one of the highest awards given to a public relations program, for ITAC's ambitious advertising campaign that promoted the use of the Illinois Relay Center to hearing people who might not be aware of its existence or how to use it. Public Service Announcements (PSAs) were developed in 15, 30 and 60 seconds and distributed to 120 broadcast and cable TV stations across Illinois. PSAs and press releases were distributed to 350 chambers of commerce and associations and press releases were sent to 73 daily and 283 weekly newspapers. ITAC received confirmation from 19 television stations, 15 newspapers and 24 chambers of commerce and associations that their information was aired or printed. In addition, the Associated Press wired the story to all of their outlets across the state.

Coinciding with students going back to school, ITAC implemented its “Kids Talk Program”, which provided a curriculum and study aids to educate teachers, students and their families about ITAC’s programs. The package includes an activity book, a three-part lesson plan, history of the TTY, poster, pencil, pencil sharpener, crayons, ruler, etc. To this date, approximately 5,100 packets have been distributed to teacher’s statewide.

Universal Telephone Service Assistance Program (UTSAP)

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 directed the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to take the necessary steps to establish support mechanisms to ensure the delivery of affordable telecommunications service to all Americans, including low-income consumers. On May 7, 1997, the FCC issued an order that required states to implement Link Up and Lifeline Programs by January 1, 1998.

The Universal Telephone Assistance Corporation (“UTAC”) and the Commission Staff worked diligently to revise 83 Illinois Administrative Code Part 757, “Telephone Assistance Programs” to incorporate the newly designed Link Up and Lifeline Programs.

Link Up is a federally funded program that assists households by paying 50% (up to \$30) of the cost of installing local telephone service in their principal place of residence. Lifeline is a federally funded program that provides \$5.25 towards the monthly charge for local telephone service.

The Universal Telephone Service Assistance Program (“UTSAP”), funded by voluntary contributions from Illinois telephone consumers, provides supplemental assistance to individuals who receive assistance from the Link Up program. In addition to the 50% waiver, \$10 assistance was applied to the consumer’s installation charge from UTSAP funds. Effective October, 1998, the supplemental assistance was raised from \$10 to the remaining 50% of the installation charge for eligible telecommunications carriers (“ETC”). Carriers who have not applied for ETC status do not receive the federal funding, however, they are eligible for 50% of the installation charge from UTSAP. Additionally, on December 15, 1998, UTAC petitioned the Commission for a monthly supplemental assistance amount of \$1.50 to be added to the existing \$5.25. This will allow the Commission to request additional federal support equal to one-half of any support generated from Illinois, bringing the total amount of monthly supplemental assistance to \$7.50. This docket is still pending. The amount of supplemental assistance is reviewed on an annual basis by the Commission according to the level of voluntary contributions.

To be eligible, recipients must currently receive benefits from one of the following programs: Food Stamps, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing, Supplemental Security Income (“SSI”), and Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (“LIHEAP”). UTSAP is administered by a not-for-profit Universal Telephone Assistance Corporation (UTAC). The UTAC Board of Directors has 9 members consisting of 5 representatives from local exchange companies, 2 members representing ratepayers, and 2 members representing low-income consumers.

The following table shows the number of recipients and voluntary contributions to the program since March 1993. Contributions leveled off between 1995 and 1997. UTAC feels that the steady decline in the number of recipients indicates that the goal of connecting eligible participants to the public switched network is being met. Implementation of the Lifeline program began in 1998. The eligibility criteria for the Link-Up program are different than those for the Lifeline program.

DATE	LINK-UP RECIPIENTS	LIFELINE RECIPIENTS	CONTRIBUTIONS
1993	15,267	--	\$242,997
1994	26,634	--	\$1,015,726
1995	24,000	--	\$801,423
1996	10,249	--	\$882,014
1997	6,720	--	\$855,600
1998	12,050	55,500	\$922,250

CONSUMER OUTREACH & EDUCATION

During 1998, the Consumer Services Division (CSD) continued to focus a considerable amount of energy and effort toward its consumer outreach and education programs. CSD conducts meetings associated with rate increase requests of small water companies if there is sufficient community interest. The staff is also available to witness meter tests performed by utilities and to make presentations on various consumer and regulatory matters to consumer groups. To keep abreast of consumer issues and concerns, CSD Staff is represented on the Chicago Energy Council, the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs Policy Advisory Council and the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs.

Public Forums

As part of its community outreach programs, CSD Staff conducted five public forums for water and sewer customers during March of 1998. The public forums provided a chance for consumers to gather near their own communities so that their opinions and concerns might become a matter of the public record. Forums for the public were held regarding the following docketed rate cases: 98-0045 for Northern Hills Water & Sewer Company; 98-0049 for Lake Marian Water Company; 98-0046 for Del Mar Water Company; 98-0047 for Great Northern Utilities, Inc.; and 98-0048 for Lake Wildwood Utilities Corporation.

Staff made a presentation to the University of Illinois Consumer and Family Economics Extension educators. The topics were electric restructuring, issues facing the Commission as a result of the new legislation, and issues surrounding competition in the telecommunications industry.

Customer Information

The Illinois Commerce Commission has developed a series of publications for consumer education and outreach. The topics include using phones away from home, maximum rates allowed for operator service providers, "900" numbers, and resolving utility problems. A complete list and description of these publications is at the end of this document.

During 1998 we have increased the information available through the Commission's web site. Currently the consumer information publications, and CSD's annual report are available. In addition, we plan to increase the information about current issues to advance consumer education. Customers are encouraged to file non-urgent complaints via the web site.

ON-GOING PROJECTS

New Local Exchange Carriers (C-LECs)

The number of companies filing with the Commission requesting certification to provide local exchange service, through resale or facilities based service, has increased dramatically in 1998, during which 75 petitions were filed. CSD Staff has participated in all of the "new LEC" proceedings through testimony or cross examination. CSD's interest in these cases is to insure that the new service providers meet the requirements of the ICC rules, including the solicitation, collection and remittance of monies for the various programs. The rules which fall within the purview of the Consumer Services Division deal with 9-1-1; TTY distribution; telecommunications relay service; telephone assistance programs; credit, billing and termination of telephone service; pay-per-call services, and preservation of telephone company records. To date, a total of 213 petitions have been filed with the Commission.

Credit Risk Assessment Pilot

The Commission approved Nicor Gas' petition (Docket No. 97-0635) on April 27, 1998 for a waiver of certain deposit rules for a two year period. During this pilot period, Nicor Gas will be able to request deposits based on a risk assessment by a third party. The program does not allow Nicor to deny an application for service. The pilot began in July. CSD is monitoring the program.

Low Income Customer Assistance Program

The Commission approved Peoples Gas' petition (Docket No. 96-0142) for this pilot program on May 8, 1996. The program was designed to provide bill-paying assistance, a positive incentive to develop a regular payment pattern, help reduce collection costs and potentially reduce bad debt. The pilot concluded at the end of July 1998.

Customer Owned Pay Telephone Service (COPTS) (92-0275)

This docket was opened in July 1992 for the purpose of developing rules (83 Ill. Adm. Code Part 771) for Customer Owned Pay Telephone Service. The Commission had received extensive complaints about pay telephone providers and the Operator Service Providers (OSPs) associated with those coin telephones. The regulations in force were set forth in the order in Docket 84-0442. In September 1993, the OSP issues were transferred to a separate docket (93-0335). If approved, staff's proposed rule on COPTS would have made a number of significant changes to the current regulations. The proposed rules would expand the definition of "public pay telephones," to encompass most pay phones in the State, improve placarding, and establish a violations procedure which could result in disconnection of service or revocation of the Certificate of Service Authority.

The case was marked "Heard and Taken" in August 1993, but the hearing examiner's proposed order was denied by the Commission. On June 7, 1995, the Commission granted a motion to reopen the record for the purpose of determining rules which did not expand the definition of "public pay telephones." Numerous hearings and a workshops have been held. It is expected that a final draft rule will be presented to the hearing examiner in the 2nd quarter of 1999.

Electric Utility Industry Restructuring

The Commission is implementing the Electric Service Customer Choice and Rate Relief Law of 1997 (P.A. 90-561). CSD Staff has been involved in the following many

rulemakings and other endeavors to implement this law. The following is a synopsis of the major proceedings during 1998.

Certification of alternative suppliers

To provide power and energy supply to retail customers in Illinois, Alternative Retail Electric Suppliers (ARES) must be certified by the Illinois Commerce Commission. Two rulemakings have been initiated to develop the rules: Docket No. 98-0544, initiated on July 22, 1998, addresses the expedited certification of ARES that seek to serve only non-residential retail customers with maximum electrical demands of one megawatt or more; Docket No. 98-0649, initiated on September 23, 1998, establishes rules for ARES seeking to serve all other non-residential customers. The rules (83 Ill. Adm. Code Part 451) promulgated through these two dockets will be finalized during the second quarter of 1999.

Environmental Disclosure

On March 11, 1998, the Commission initiated Docket No. 98-0194 to promulgate rules concerning environmental disclosure that are to be made to customers. The information that must be disclosed includes the known sources of electricity and the amounts of carbon dioxide, nitrous oxides and sulfur dioxide emissions and nuclear waste attributable to the known sources of electricity. The rules require electric utilities and ARES to provide the information to customers on a quarterly basis and to provide the Commission with the information to include on its World Wide Web site. The first information will be available in April 1999.

Lottery

Beginning October 1, 1999, delivery services will be offered to non-residential customers. Section 16-104 of the Public Utilities Act describes the process by which customers will be eligible for choice on a phased in basis. The utility will offer delivery services to any non-residential retail customer with a maximum demand of 4 megawatts or more at a single site. Eligibility of other non-residential customers representing approximately 1/3 of remaining annual non-residential kilowatt-hour sales will be determined by lottery as approved by the Commission in Docket 98-0650. Utilities are required to notify customers about the lottery and their options. Utilities will submit their draft lottery mailings to be reviewed by Staff, including members of CSD, to ensure that the tone and content of the language accurately reflect agreements of workshop participants. The lottery will be held by July 15, 1999 and customers will be informed of the results. Customers must register to participate in the lottery; however, being selected does not obligate customers to change suppliers, it just keeps their options open. Delivery services will be available to all remaining non-residential customers by December 31, 2000 and to all residential customers May 1, 2002.

Consumer Education Program

In crafting the law that restructures the electricity industry in Illinois, lawmakers recognized that average consumers will need meaningful information that will allow them to evaluate goods and services offered by new marketers and sellers. The law requires the Commission to implement and maintain a consumer education program to provide residential and small commercial retail customers with information to help them understand their service options in a competitive electric services market, as well as their rights and responsibilities. Section 16-117 of the Public Utilities Act requires the Commission to form a working group for the purpose of creating educational materials to be distributed to electric customers. As required by the law, the Commission formed a working group consisting of 5 representatives of the investor-owned utilities in Illinois, 2 representatives of alternative retail electric suppliers, 3 representing the interests of consumers, and members representing Commission staff.

The Working Group is responsible for developing a package of printed educational material which meets the requirements of the law and submit the package to the Commission for approval along with recommendations for implementing the consumer education program. Educational material for small commercial customers must be submitted for Commission review by March 1, 1999; material for residential customers is due by November 1, 2001.

At a minimum, the materials must include the following: an explanation of basic terms and the structure of the competitive marketplace; the choices available to customers whether to take service from a alternative retail electric supplier or remain as a retail customer of an electric utility; customer rights and responsibilities; legal obligations of alternative retail electric suppliers; the identity of services that may be offered on an competitive basic services that an electric utility is required to provide according to tariffed rates; components

of a bill; complaint procedures; and additional information available from the Commission upon request.

The Working Group began to meet in open meetings in July, and recommended that a vendor be hired to assist the Group with developing the necessary material and implementation plan. MWW/Agenda was retained. A bill insert and a brochure were developed to satisfy the requirement for printed material. The bill insert will be sent by utilities at a time determined by the Commission and by ARES in their first mailing to customers or prior to the time by which an alternative retail electric supplier executes an agreement or contract with a customer. The vendor developed an implementation plan to conduct targeted media relations activities together with grassroots outreach focused on small commercial electricity customers. In addition to the material submitted for Commission approval, a video, a media kit and public service announcements will be developed. The Commission will have a consumer education web site at: www.icc.state.il.us/pluginillinois where consumers can access the approved material and other pertinent information.

Delivery Services Tariffs

Each utility will file tariffs which will be used when customers choose an alternative supplier for their power and energy. The delivery services, or distribution, function of electric service will continue to be provided by the electric utility, but the terms of the tariffs will be different than the traditional tariffs. To determine the issues and substance that should be included in these new tariffs workshops were held beginning in the summer of 1998. There was a wide range of workshop topics. CSD Staff led one group concerning the "consumer issues" and was an active participant in several other groups concerning: the processing of requests to switch providers; communications protocols between utilities, suppliers and customers; and dispute resolution. The consumer issues group worked through processes and forms for switching suppliers, releasing customer data and issues surrounding billing and collections. As a part of the 98-0680 docket, Staff will develop a template tariff of the terms and conditions it recommends to be included in utility tariffs. The individual utility tariffs must be approved by the Commission by September 1, 1999.

Energy Assistance Program Design Group

The legislation includes an amendment to the Energy Assistance Act of 1985 which created the Energy Assistance Program Design Group and charged it with advising the "General Assembly with respect to designing a low income energy assistance program for the period beginning on July 1, 2002." The working group comprises: legislators; designees from certain state agencies; consumers --low-income, residential, commercial and industrial; public utilities; municipal utilities; and cooperatives. The Illinois Commerce Commission is represented on this group by a CSD Staff member.

95-0550 (Revision of Part 280)

83 Ill. Adm. Code Part 280 establishes the procedures for gas, electric, water and sanitary sewer utilities governing eligibility for service, deposits, payment practices and discontinuance of service. On November 7, 1995, the Commission entered an order opening a docket to revise Part 280. Participants representing all interested parties held workshop and participated in ad hoc subcommittee meetings from December 1995 through June 1996. In mid-July Staff notified the participants that future workshops would be delayed because of the ramifications of the legislative initiative on the restructuring of the utility industry. Legislation which would restructure the electric industry was signed by the Governor December 16, 1997. The Commission entered an order dismissing the docket in April 1998.

Dockets 98-0200 & 98-0537

These two matters were consolidated into one proceeding, and they relate to the local calling areas and rates provided to customers of GTE. The complainants have asked the Commission to restructure both of these items, and the case is still proceeding. CSD was contacted by individual consumers during 1998, voicing similar concerns to those expressed by the complainants in the docketed proceedings. To help facilitate this matter, CSD worked with GTE to provide the company with information on the comments and interests of its consumers.

Electric Reliability

This topic became important several times during 1998, as Commission Staff worked with the electric industry and consumer advocates in developing rules to comport with the "Electric Service Customer Choice and Rate Relief Law of 1997." During the Summer of 1998, grave concerns were raised throughout the Mid-West that power generation might not match the needs of consumers throughout the area. With daily updates from the Mid-American Interconnected Network (MAIN) reliability council, Commission Staff monitored the situation, and no drastic curtailments of service were required. Reliability became a hot topic again, late in 1998 when lengthy outages occurred in the Chicagoland area. Again, Commission Staff has worked closely with both consumers and utilities to address these concerns. Input from local governments has helped greatly in this regard.

Customer Survey

Currently we are about to begin work, with a survey consultant, on an electric service survey. The need for this survey was brought about by the Electric Service Customer Choice and Rate Relief Law of 1997. The law states each electric utility or alternative retail electric supplier owning, controlling, or operating transmission and distribution facilities and equipment subject to the Commission's jurisdiction is to annually submit to the Commission a detailed report, including a customer satisfaction survey. The survey is to cover -- among other areas identified in Commission rules -- reliability, customer service and understanding of the jurisdictional entity's services and prices.

NOTEWORTHY DOCKETED CASES

Docket 98-0321: Gallatin River Communications, L.L.C. and Central Telephone Company of Illinois Joint Petition. (Final Order issued on October 21, 1998) This was a petition for an order approving a purchase and sale of assets and related agreements granting to Gallatin River Communications, L.L.C. (“Gallatin”) of certificates of exchange service authority and inter-exchange service authority, the discontinuance by Central Telephone Company of Illinois (“Centel- Illinois”) of service, and a petition approving designation of Gallatin. as an eligible telecommunications carrier covering the service area consisting of the 24 exchanges to be acquired from Centel Illinois upon the closing of this purchase and sale of assets. The Commission approved the acquisition of Centel-Illinois by Gallatin. Gallatin is a newly formed company based in North Carolina which is ultimately owned by Madison River Telephone Company L.L.C. (“Madison River”). Gallatin will continue to assess the same rates and charges as those used by Centel-Illinois. The Commission attached several conditions to the acquisition covering such matters as an earnings report, cost studies, a service quality report and access to books and records.

Docket 98-0263/98-0325/98-0351: City of Rochelle, City of Rock Falls, and City of Springfield Applications for Certificates of Service Authority. (Final orders issued July 22, 1998, November 18, 1998, and November 5, 1998, respectively). In these dockets, the Commission granted Certificates of Service Authority to provide resold and facilities-based inter-exchange telecommunications services within Illinois and resold and facilities-based local exchange telecommunications services within designated areas. These are the first municipalities in Illinois to become certificated to provide telecommunications services.

Docket 98-0754: MJD Communications, Inc., MJD Services Corp., Ravenswood Communications, Inc., and The El Paso Telephone Company Joint Application. (Final Order issued on December 16, 1998) This was a joint application for approval of the reorganization of the El Paso Telephone Company and for all other appropriate relief. In this proceeding the Commission approved the reorganization of the El Paso Telephone Company (“El Paso”). The reorganization stems from a Stock Purchase Agreement under which MJD Services Corp., a subsidiary of MJD Communications, Inc. (collectively “MJD”), purchased all of the issued and outstanding capital stock of Ravenswood Communications, Inc., which is the owner of all of the issued and outstanding shares of common stock of the El Paso. El Paso is a local exchange carrier subject to Commission regulation. The Commission conditioned approval on MJD not raising retail rates for a period of one year following the reorganization.

Docket 98-0555: SBC Communications, Inc., Ameritech Corporation joint application for approval of the reorganization... The joint application was filed on July 24, 1998. A status hearing was held on December 7 and continued to January 25, 1999, for hearings.

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

The Illinois Commerce Commission has developed a series of publications for consumer education and outreach. Following is a listing of those which may be of interest to both utility consumers and individuals needing information on the Commission.

InfoCards: (informational postcards) offer utility consumers practical information in an easy-to-read, single sheet format. There are 7 unique InfoCards which address consumers' rights and responsibilities with regards to: 1. Utility Bills; 2. Payment Plans for Utility Service; 3. Disconnecting Utility Service; 4. Reconnecting Utility Service; 5. Deposits for Utility Service; 6. Resolving Your Utility Problems; and 7. Mediation. The post card format allows counselors to rapidly send the necessary information to address customer inquiries in these areas.

InfoPac: (informational packets) provide the identical information as the InfoCard, but in one document. The InfoPac is distributed to consumers who require information on several topics at once. Additionally, the ICC provides copies to local administering agencies which provide intake for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), to community groups who work with low income consumers and to people who attend consumer forums.

Your Quick Reference Guide to Preparing for a Formal Complaint Hearing: is a consumer's "how-to" guide for preparing for a formal complaint hearing with topics such as: setting the hearing date, obtaining witnesses, supplying the necessary documentation, following the hearing procedures, accepting or appealing the Commission's decision, and filing for a rehearing.

Smart Shoppers Guide to Using Phones Away from Home: informs and cautions telephone users to be aware of charges levied by Operator Service Providers when using telephones away from home. It also addresses the consumers rights to access the carrier of their choice and to be notified of the rates which will be assessed to them.

Rates and Charges for Using an Operator's Service in Illinois: is a postcard which provides the maximum rates per minute for intrastate calls and the maximum surcharges for making operator-assisted calls. In addition, it explains what consumers can do if they have been overcharged. This is updated annually based on the approved rates.

What You Should Know About Using "900" Numbers: highlights 83 Illinois Administrative Code Part 772 by providing information on pay-per-call services. Topics such as the preamble that the information provider must provide and what will happen if the consumer doesn't pay the bill are among those addressed.

Rights and Responsibilities as an Electric, Gas or Water Utility Customer: provides an extensive overview of the utility consumers' rights and responsibilities; it does not include telephone service.

Where Did You Learn to Talk Like That?: is a dictionary of terms, titles, and phrases frequently used at the Illinois Commerce Commission. It includes terms such as "cogeneration," "docket," "interexchange carrier," "tariffs," etc.

The Ratepayer's Bill of Rights: is a list of ten basic rights all Illinois utility consumers should expect.

Facts About Consumer Complaints: outlines the two basic levels of complaints, informal and formal, which the Illinois Commerce Commission handles.

A Consumer's Guide to Electric Service Restructuring: provides information about electric service restructuring in Illinois. It includes topics such as what is changing, what consumers will be choosing, when options will be available, and a glossary of key terms.

